A cure for the king

There once lived a very silly king who thought he was very sick. The greatest doctors in the kingdom could not find anything wrong with him, and so could not cure him. “There’s nothing wrong with his body,” they said. “It’s all in his head. He is just a hypochondriac.”

Yet the king lay in bed all day long, moaning and groaning: “I’ll reward anyone who finds a cure for my ailments.”

The word spread throughout the city. A stranger who was visiting the city heard about the reward and the king’s strange disease. He went to a shop which sold sherbet and bought a jar of the sweet red liquid. Then he went to the palace and asked to see the king. “The king is ill. You can’t see him,” said the minister. “But I have brought a cure,” said the young stranger.

The minister shrugged his shoulders and took him into the king’s chamber. “I have brought you the rare Red Medicine, my lord. It will cure you,” said the young stranger, bowing low before the king.

“How can one medicine cure me?” moaned the king, who looked perfectly healthy. “I have a hundred ailments.”

“The Red Medicine cures every illness. But remember, while you are taking it, don’t think of an elephant. If you do, you must not take medicine on that day,” said the stranger.

The next morning the king was about to take his medicine when he thought, ‘I must not think of an elephant,’ and consequently could think of nothing else. The more he tried not to think about elephants, the more he thought about them. Images of Ganesha, charging rouge elephants and little baby elephants following their mothers crowded into his mind. He could think of nothing else. And because he thought of elephants he could not take the Red Medicine.

A month went by and the stranger returned to the palace. “Maharaj, has the rare Red Medicine helped you?” he asked the king, who was propped up on his pillows. “I couldn’t touch it,” said the king. “I could think of nothing but elephants.” “But what about the aches caused by your ailments?” asked the stranger. “Didn’t they bother you?”

“Aches! Ailments! Why, I haven’t even thought of them!” exclaimed the king in surprise. “Or I felt ill. I was too busy trying not to think of elephants.”

“This proves that there wasn’t any illness. If you were in real pain no amount of elephants could keep you from feeling ill,” the young stranger said with a smile. “You are cured, Maharaj!”

“And so I am,” said the king with a laugh, and he gave the man a bag full of gold coins. From then on the king did not spend his time in bed imagining he was ill when he was not.